

REGIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE NORTH CENTRAL REGION

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Abstract

The North Central region is part of the region of level 1 (NUTS-1) "North and South-East Bulgaria." Aside from District Veliko Turnovo, Gabrovo, Ruse, Razgrad and Silistra (NUTS-3). Nature of the area is characterized by a pronounced zoning - from north to south includes parts of the Danube plain, Balkan and Stara Planina. The region is in the temperate climate zone. Water resources are limited stocks, although the territory pass one of the largest rivers in the country - Rosica, Yantra, Ruse Lom. Land resources - agricultural land in the region are 15.3% of those of the country.

The demographic situation in the region is unfavorable - permanently reduced fertility, increased mortality and worsens the population age structure. We need new, effective policies to limit and stop these negative processes.

With GDP per capita in 2012, the North Central area ranks fifth in the other areas of level 2 in Bulgaria. The structure of gross value added of the region is characterized by a strong dominance of the service sector, where form 57.87% of the total value added in NCR. In the industrial sector produced 32.72% of the regional added value and contribution of the agriculture and forestry is only 9.41%. There are good opportunities for tourism development. The region comprises five districts - Rousse, Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Silistra, Razgrad.

Keywords: area, standard of living, population, cities, tourism

Résumé

La région du Centre-Nord fait partie de la région de niveau 1 (NUTS 1) «Nord et Sud-est de la Bulgarie." Mis à part le district de Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Ruse, Razgrad et Silistra (NUTS 3). Nature de la région est caractérisée par un zonage prononcé - du nord au sud comprend une partie de la plaine du Danube, des Balkans et de la Stara Planina. Cette région est dans la zone de climat tempéré. Les ressources en eau sont stocks limités, bien que le territoire passe l'un des plus grands fleuves du pays -

Rosica, Yantra, Ruse Lom. Les ressources en terres - terres agricoles dans la région sont de 15,3% de celles du pays.

La situation démographique de la région est défavorable - réduction de la fertilité de façon permanente, l'augmentation de la mortalité et aggrave la structure par âge de la population. Nous avons besoin de nouvelles politiques efficaces pour limiter et arrêter ces processus négatifs. Avec un PIB par habitant en 2012, la région du Centre-Nord occupe la cinquième place dans les autres régions de niveau 2 en Bulgarie.

La structure de la valeur ajoutée brute de la région se caractérise par une forte prédominance du secteur des services, où la forme 57,87% de la valeur ajoutée totale dans la RCN. Dans le secteur industriel produit 32,72% de la valeur ajoutée régionale et la contribution de l'agriculture et de la sylviculture n'est 9,41%. Il ya de bonnes opportunités pour le développement du tourisme. La région comprend cinq districts - Rousse, Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Silistra, Razgrad.

Mots-clés: zone, niveau de vie, la population, les villes, le tourisme.

1- Introduction

The North Central Region is a part of the Level 1 (NUTS 1) region of Northern and Eastern Bulgaria. It consists of the districts of Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Ruse, Razgrad and Silistra (Level NUTS-3) (Fig.1).

The region is bordered by the Republic of Romania (it has a wide outlet to the Danubian riverside) to the North, by the North Eastern Region to the East, by the South-Eastern Region to the South, and by the North-Western Region to the West.

The surface of the region is 14 974 km², making up 13,49% of the territory of the country.

Natural conditions and resources: analysis and assessment. Nature of the region is characterized by marked zonation – from the North to the South there are parts of the Danubian Plain, the Fore-Balkan and the Balkan Mountains. They have different geological structure and paleogeographic development, which determines the altitude and the predominating surface forms – river valleys, kettles, plateaus. Some deposits of mineral resources have been discovered – black coals (Tryavna), but the reserves are small. Larger are the reserves of non-metallic minerals – kaolin (Vetovo, Senovo), quartz sand (Elena), limestone and marl (Basarbovo, Krasen and Pirogovo), fireproof clay (Kilifarevo, Sevlievo), basalt (Svishtov, Suhindol). Their usage is in the beginning of different productions – of building materials, china, glass, ceramics and others.



Fig. 1 Regions of Bulgaria on Level NUTS-2.

The territory of the region is in the temperate-continental climatic zone. Only in the southernmost parts (the municipalities of Sevlievo, Gabrovo, Tryavna, Elena, Veliko Tarnovo), in the territories with altitude more than 1600 m, the climate is mountainous. During winter in some of the kettles the temperatures drop sharply (temperature inversions, near Sevlievo were measured some of the lowest January temperatures in the country of minus 35°C). In summer temperatures reach high levels – Ruse, Svishtov, Veliko Tarnovo, which characterize the typical continental character of the climate. The average annual precipitations vary between 500 and 670 mm, and in the Central Balkan they are significantly larger.

Water resources are limited, although some of the largest rivers in the country – Rositsa, Yantra, Rusenski Lom, pass through its territory. Bigger are the quantities of underground waters, which are used for industrial and public water-supply. In order to keep the balance of water-supply for the settlements and the economy, large artificial lakes were built – “Al. Stamboliysky”, “Yovkovtsy” and “Beli Lom”. The waters of the Danube River are used for irrigation of the crops. The mineral waters near the villages of Voneshta Voda and Ovcha Mogila are of social importance. In the Easternmost part is the only preserved lake near the Danube River – “Srebarna”, which is now a biosphere reserve under the protection of UNESCO.

Land resources – the agricultural lands in the region are 15,3% of these of the country. Chernozems (in the Danubian Plain), grey woodland (The Fore-Balkan), mountain-meadow (in Central Stara Planina) and alluvial-meadow soils along the riversides predominate. The soil diversity of the region is great and it influences strongly the development of agricultural economy. In order to preserve and keep the natural diversity, were established the natural reserve – “Central Balkan” National Park, and the natural parks – “Rusenski Lom”, “Etara”, “Haydushki Chukar”, “Peeshti Skali” – near the villages of Stokite and Kravenik (Dimov, 2012).

On 31.12.2012 **the number of the population** in the region is 848 989 people, representing 11,69% of the total population of the country. The average **density of the population** in the North Central Region is 57,51 people per square km, and it is lower than the average of the country - 66,35 people per square km.

Biggest is the relative share of the population in the district of Veliko Tarnovo (30,02% of the population in the North Central Region), and smallest – in the district of Silistra (13,87%) (Fig. 2).

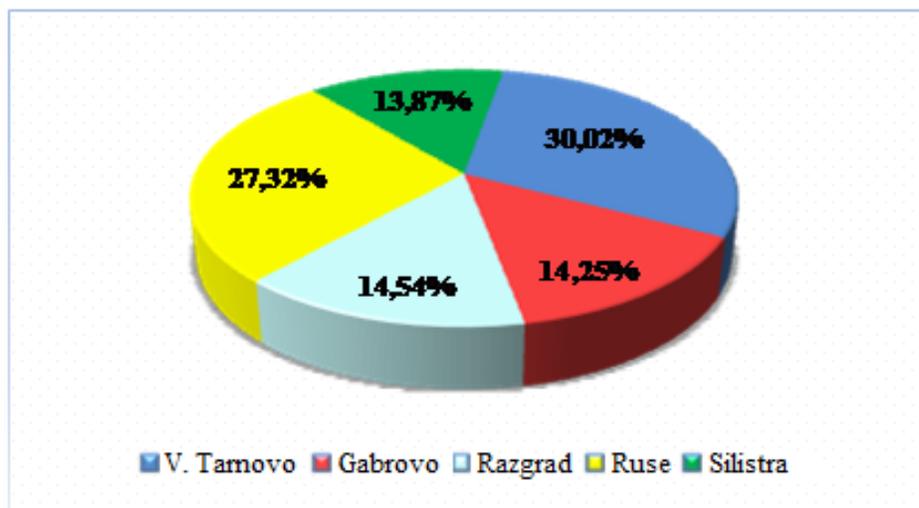


Fig 2. Relative share of the population of the North Central Region by districts as on 31.12.2012 (%). Source: National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria

In the period between the two censuses 2001-2011 (Fig. 3), the population of the North Central Region decreased by 136 965 people, or by 13,72%. This tendency is steady in time and is due mainly to emigration and to the negative population growth in the region during the last ten years.

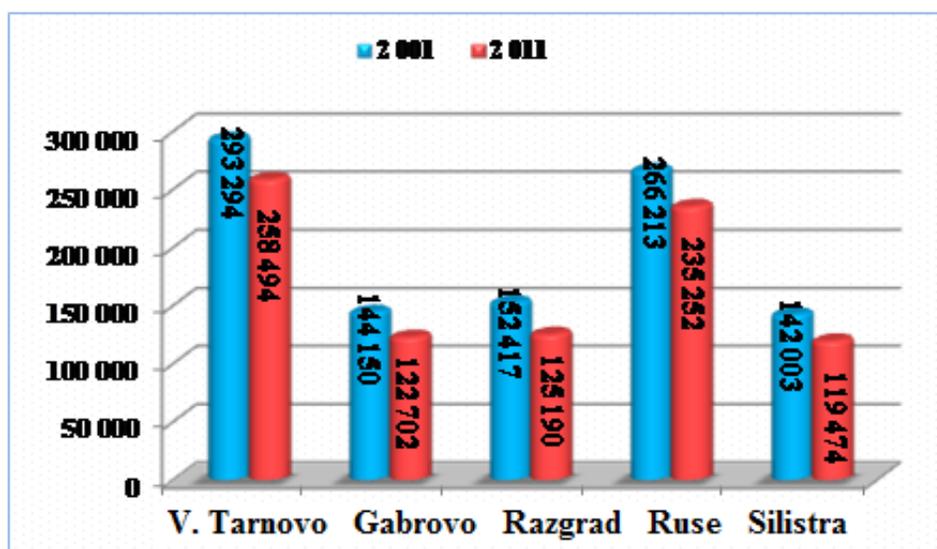


Fig. 3. Number of the population by districts in the North Central Region according to the censuses in 2001 and 2011. Source: *National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria*

The demographic situation in the region is unfavorable – the birth-rate is permanently decreasing, the death-rate is increasing, and the age structure of the population is getting worse. New effective policies for restriction and suspension of these negative processes are needed. The average birth-rate in the region is 8,5‰ (lower than the average in the country – 9,5‰). The average death-rate is high – 16,8‰ (15‰ for the country). Unfavorable tendency is the increasing of the death-rate coefficient during the last years. The population growth is negative - minus 8,2‰ (–5,5‰ for the country) (NSI, 2013).

The extent of urbanization in the region is 66,64% and it is lower than the average value for the country – 72,67% as on 31.12.2012. **The town centers** are 39. One of the seven biggest towns in the country of national and international significance with population over 100 000 people is situated in the region – the town of Ruse, with population of 149 134 people. There are four middle-sized towns with population of more than 30 000 people, which are district centers – Veliko Tarnovo (68 735 people), Gabrovo (58 367 people), Silistra (35 230 people) and Razgrad (33 416 people). There is also another town with population more than 30 000 people – Gorna Oryahovitsa (31 437 people), and two towns with over 20 000 people – Svishtov (29 846 people), and Sevlievo (22 516 people), which complement and counterweight the district centers. The main urbanization axes are Sofia/Pleven – Ruse, Pleven – Veliko Tarnovo – Shumen/Varna, and the one in meridian direction Ruse-Veliko Tarnovo – Gabrovo – Kazanlak – Stara Zagora – Haskovo – Kardzhali – Makaza, which continues to the North from Ruse to Giurgiu – Bucharest. The secondary axes of urban development are Ruse – Razgrad – Shumen/Varna and Silistra – Dobrich/Varna.

Regarding the ethnic composition, the region is homogeneous. The Bulgarians are 72,9%. Significant part is the Turkish population (22%) in the regions of Ruse, Razgrad and Silistra. The Romas are 3,4%.

The economic activity in the North Central Region is one of the lowest in Bulgaria. The coefficient of economic activity of the population at and over 15 years old in the region is 47,7% in 2012 and it is under the average for the country (51,3%).

In 2012 **the unemployment coefficient** in the region registers growth and reaches 12,9%.

The value of **the gross domestic product** by current prices for the North Central Region in 2012 reaches 2 860 mln. euros. The region has limited contribution to the general GDP compared to the other regions on level NUTS 2, forming just 7,91% of the GDP of the country (**North Central Region, 2012**).

The North Central Region is on the fifth place compared to the other level 2 regions in Bulgaria by the **GDP per capita** index in 2012 (Table 1). The average value of the GDP per capita in the North Central Region is 3 148 euros, while the average for the country is 4 800 euros.

In comparison to the regions in the EU, the North Central Region, which has similar index to four of the six Bulgarian regions on level NUTS 2 (excluding the South Western Region, which is in better position), by the index of reached level of economic development is under the average in EU. **GDP per capita by parity of purchasing power (PPS)** of the region for 2012 is 29% of the average value for EU-27.

Table 1. GDP per capita in PPS compared to the average of EU-27 for 2007-2012 (%)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
European Union – 27	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
BULGARIA	35	37	38	40	44	44
<i>North Central Region</i>	27	28	28	28	30	29

Source: Eurostat, National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria

The structure of the gross added value in the region is characterized by strong superiority of the service sector, which forms 57,87% of the general added value in the North Central Region. The industry sector produces 32,72% of the regional added value, and the contribution of the agriculture and forestry sector is just 9,41%.

In the **structure of the regional economy** economic activities of the industrial and the service sector predominate. The region forms 8,4% of the country's gross domestic product. The share of the economic activities of the third sector increases – they form 57,3% of the gross domestic product. The industrial sector forms 26,2%, and the agrarian forms 16,5%. In the territorial organization of the regional

economy strong influence have two main axes of development – one of them formed along the Danubian riverside – Svishtov, Ruse, Tutrakan and Silistra, and the second one – in the interior of the region – Gabrovo, Veliko Tarnovo, Gorna Oryahovitsa and Razgrad. The effective distribution of economic activities between these two axes will determine the rates of development, the competitiveness and quality of life of the population in the region.

The specialization of the **agriculture sector** is plantgrowing-stockbreeding. From the cultivated crops largest areas are taken up by wheat and maize (the districts of Silistra, Razgrad, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo). The region produces 22,4% of the wheat and over 30,0% of the maize in the country. Specialized branch is the production of industrial crops – sunflower, tobacco, in the Danubian Plain (the districts of Ruse, Silistra, Razgrad). Great traditions have the vegetable-growing (Veliko Tarnovo District). The specialization is supplemented by fruit-growing (the districts of Gabrovo, Silistra, Ruse) and vine-growing (the districts of Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, Razgrad, Silistra). The main directions of the stockbreeding are cattle-breeding (the districts of Veliko Tarnovo, Ruse, Razgrad), pig-breeding which develops on the existing fodder base, and sheep-breeding. Traditions in the poultry-raising have the districts of Veliko Tarnovo and Ruse. During the last years increases the number of buffalos and goats.

The forestry is typical for the southern parts of the region with centers Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Tryavna and Elena. Important about the development of the branches of the agriculture sector are the research institutes in Veliko Tarnovo and Ruse.

In the **industrial sector** largest share of the production has the machinery construction, food, textile and chemical industry. The main production is in the sphere of foods, beverages and tobacco products (30,0% of the total industrial production in the region). Major centers of meat and meat products are Ruse, V. Tarnovo, Silistra, Razgrad; of dairy products – V. Tarnovo, Ruse, Silistra, Razgrad; of high quality wines and brandies – Lyaskovets, Svishtov, Suhindol, Ruse, Silistra. In Gorna Oryahovitsa is situated the largest factory for sugar and sugar products in the country. Some of the specialized industries are the production of sanitary fittings – Sevlievo, textile machinery and instrumental equipment – Gabrovo, production of aluminum automobile parts in Ruse, building and repairing of river ships – Ruse, chemical industry – the companies “Prista Oil”, “Orgachim”-Ruse, “Svilozha”-Svishtov, “Cap. Dyado Nikola”-Gabrovo, “Etar”-V. Tarnovo. Important functions in the region have the textile industry (Tryavna, Gabrovo, Ruse, V. Tarnovo), the clothing industry (Ruse, Byala) and the knitwear industry (Tryavna, Gabrovo, Ruse). Large companies producing furniture work in Ruse, Silistra, Tryavna, Gabrovo. The production of glass (Razgrad), china and ceramic articles (Razgrad, Isperih, Sevlievo) develop dynamically.

A modern industrial park was built in Ruse. The purpose is development of high-tech productions based on foreign investments. The park is on the territory of the Ivanovo Municipality and a new railway line is intended to be built (Dimov, 2012).

In 2012, in the structure of distribution of **direct foreign investments** by regions of the level 2 in the country, the North Central Region is on the fifth place with a relative share of 3,69% of these in the country.

In 2012 the **income from overnights** in the region is 22 738 942 levs, which compared to the country represents only 3,1%, including from foreigners – 1,18%. The internal regional differences regarding tourism continue to be clearly outlined, and the district of Veliko Tarnovo takes the leading place by development of the tourist base, realized bed days and revenues from overnights.

The region has scientific and intellectual potential for realization of **research and development activity (RDA)**, which is concentrated in the universities and the specialized higher schools in the region. In 2012 the expenditures for RDA in the North Central Region amounted to 7 150 000 levs, which is 1,7 % of the expenditures for RDA in the country (421 612 000 levs). For the period 2007-2012 they increased with 3 115 000 levs. In spite of the permanent tendency of increasing of expenditures for scientific work during the last years, the region is on one of the last places in the country by this indicator.

The Education system and the network of **educational institutions** on the territory of the North Central Region are relatively well developed. The number of educational institutions during the school year 2011/2012 is 336, which puts the region somewhere in the middle by provided educational services in the country. The region has 5 universities and specialized higher schools.

The Health services system in the North Central Region is relatively well developed, with a network of hospitals. On the territory of the region on 31.12.2012 there are 37 hospitals with 4 941 beds, 218 hospitals for outpatient care with 84 beds and 27 other health establishments with 686 beds. There are 18 multifarious hospitals in the region, 13 specialized hospitals, 2 centers for mental health, 2 centers for dermal-venereal diseases, 2 complex oncology centers, 10 diagnostic-consultative centers, 55 medical centers, 3 dental centers, 150 separate medical-diagnostic and medical-technical laboratories, 5 centers for emergency medical aid and 23 branches for emergency medical aid. The provision with hospital beds per 100 000 people is 578,93 beds/100 000 people and it is under the average for the country – 646,78 beds/100 000 people as on 31.12.2012. The length of the **road network** in the region is 6 245 km, and 2 964 km of them are roads of the National road network, and the other 3 281 km are municipal roads. The density of the functioning roads part of the National road network in the North Central Region is 0,198 km/km² and it is highest compared to the other regions and the average for the country (0,176 km/km²) as on 31.12.2012. The average density of the high class roads (highways and First class roads) is 0,031 km/km², as the average in the country. There are no built sections of highways on the territory of the North Central Region, but in a long-term plan 80 kilometers of the “Hemus” highway are going to be built in the section “Border with the North-Western Region (with the District of Lovech) – border with the North-Eastern Region (with the District of Targovishte)”. Sections of some of the First class roads pass through the North Central Region – I-5 (E-85) Ruse – Byala – Veliko Tarnovo – Gabrovo – Stara Zagora –

Kardzhaly – the “Makaza” Pass – Alexandrupolis, I-2 (E-70) Ruse – Razgrad – Varna, I-3 (E-83) Sofia – Pleven – Byala and E-772 Yablanitsa – Veliko Tarnovo – Shumen – Varna.

The railway system has a key role and importance for the economic development and the development of the network of town centers in the North Central Region. The general length of the built and functioning railway lines on the territory of the region on 31.12.2012 is 627 km, which represents 15,40% of the state railway system. The density of the railway system of the region – 41,87 km/1000 km², is higher than the average for the country (36,68 km/1000 km²) as on 31.12.2012, which puts the region on the second place after the South-Western Region. The main railway lines which pass through the territory of the North Central Region are Sofia – Gorna Oryahovitsa – Varna, Ruse – Gorna Oryahovitsa – Dabovo – Dimitrovgrad, and Ruse – Varna. The Ruse – Varna railway has an important role for the functioning of the national transport system, because it connects paneuropean transport corridor № 7 and corridor № 8. The *Danube Bridge 1* (Fig. 4) connects the railway systems of Bulgaria and Romania, which provides conditions for intermodal transportation in North-South direction along the corridor № 9 and in East-West direction from Varna – Ruse to the Central and Western part of the European Union.



Fig. 4. The Danube Bridge, the town of Ruse.

The North Central Region is well serviced by **water transport**. The Northern border of the region and of the country follows the Danube River – the only navigable river in Bulgaria and the only internal waterway in the country. The waterway of the Danube River is one of the Paneuropean transport corridors – №7, which has the important role to integrate the regions of Eastern Europe to the common market of the European Union. There are some ports of national and international significance that operate on the territory of the region – Ruse, Svishtov, Tutrakan and Silistra. The largest Bulgarian river port is Ruse,

situated on the important combined crossroad of the Paneuropean transport corridors № 7 and № 9 and it is an important multimodal center.

There are **two airports** on the territory of the region: the airport of Gorna Oryahovitsa and the airport of Ruse (which doesn't operate). The Gorna Oryahovitsa airport is international and is used for charters, cargo and passenger flights, import and export of agricultural and industrial products from and to Bulgaria, Europe, Asia, the Near East and Africa. The Ruse airport is regional and is situated near the intersection of the two Paneuropean transport corridors – № 7 and № 9. The airport practically doesn't operate since 2000. There are some plans for it to be developed as a civic airport for national purposes.

Two of the **European Transport Corridors** cross each other on the territory of the Ruse District, in the town of Ruse:

- Corridor № 7: The Danube River
- Corridor № 9: Finland – Russia – Romania – Bulgaria – Greece: Helsinki – Sankt Petersburg – Moscow/Pskov – Kiev – Liubashivka – Kishinev – Bucharest – Ruse – Dimitrovgrad – Alexandroupoli.

The two Paneuropean corridors are supplemented by the TRACECA Corridor: Europe – Caucasus – Asia.

The information security of the population in the NCR is on a good level. The communication infrastructure is well developed, with relatively good quality of the telecommunication relations in the region. During the period 2007-2014 increased the number of households with internet connection. Although their share of 42,7% for 2012 is smaller than the average for the country (45,0%) and for EU-27 (73%), the second place of the North Central Region just after the South-Western Region is accepted as a positive trend in its development.

The relative share of the households having broadband internet connection in the North Central Region (38%) is close to the average for the country (39,8%) and by this indicator the region is on the second place in 2012. By the average share of the people who regularly use internet, the North Central Region is on the third place with 42,6%, but the value of the indicator is lower than the average of the country (46,4%). The relative share of the people who never used internet is 49,8% and it is higher than the average for the country (45,8%).

By the level of development of the **water-supplying system**, the North Central Region is in the top rank in the country, having a share of the population with water-supply of 99,7% in 2012, with average value for the country of 99,1%. But compared to the other regions the North Central Region has the highest share of population who have regulated water-supply – 3,9%, with average value of 1,0% for the country. The region is significantly lacking by the level of development of the **sewerage** and possession of **wastewater treatment plants**.

The system for organized waste collection is well developed. 22 depots work on the territory of the region, which makes up 12,79% of the total number in the country. Mainly the waste collection is

organized in 4 regional depots for waste disposal – in the towns of Ruse, Silistra, Sevlievo and Razgrad. (99,8 %) and Gabrovo (99,2%) exceed the average for the country – 98,2% in 2012.

The expenditures for preservation and recovery of the environment in the North Central Region in 2012 are 64 137 lv. altogether, and they make up just 5,04% of these of the country, thus putting the region on the last place, compared to the other regions from level 2. The biggest expenditures for preservation of the environment in 2012 were made in the district of Veliko Tarnovo (31,68% from the expenditures in the North Central Region), followed by the districts of Ruse (29,95%), Silistra (16,83%) and Razgrad (15,08%), and the smallest expenditures were made in the district of Gabrovo (6,46%). **The expenditures for preservation and recovery of the environment per capita in the North Central Region** are 71,11 lv. per person as on 31.12.2012, which is significantly under the average for the country – 169,73 lv. per person.

The natural protected areas, including those in Natura 2000, cover together 22,3% of the territory of the North Central Region. In the region are situated 94 out of 966 **protected areas** in Bulgaria in 31.12.2012. **The protected areas** are: part of the “Central Balkan” National Park, three natural parks – “Balgarka”, “Persina” and “Rusenski Lom”, three reserves – “Byala Krava”, “Peeshti Skali”, and “Beli Lom”, three managed reserves – “Sachov Chair”, “Haidushki Chukar” and “Srebarna”, 21 natural landmarks and 63 protected areas. The North Central Region has a small share of the protected areas in the country – 2,97%.

In the North Central Region there are together 69 **protected zones** in Natura 2000 – 46 zones according the Directive 92/43/EEC for protection of the natural habitats of the wild flora and fauna and 23 zones according the Directive 2009/147/EC for protection of the wild birds, with a relative share of 21,5% of the region’s territory.

On the territory of the North Central Region are situated significant **cultural-historical sites of national and international importance**. In the North Central Region are situated 22 out of the 100 National Tourist Sites: in the District of Veliko Tarnovo – 5, Gabrovo – 8; Razgrad – 2; Ruse – 2 and Silistra – 5.

The sites on the territory of the region that are included in the list of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage of UNESCO are: the “Srebarna” Nature Reserve; the Thracian Tomb near the village of Sveshtari, and the Ivanovo Rock-hewn churches.

In the district of Veliko Tarnovo is one of the largest concentration places of cultural and historical monuments in the country. There are about 140 cultural monuments of national significance on its territory (almost 15% of all the monuments in the country), which are situated mainly in the municipalities of Veliko Tarnovo, Svishtov and Elena. Here is the biggest concentration of monasteries in Bulgaria (“Tarnovo’s Sveta Gora”).

In the district of Gabrovo there are many historical sites and national cultural monuments. In the district of Razgrad are registered about 1 200 immovable monuments – sites of the cultural-historical heritage, as well as two Architectural-historical reserves of national significance, and others.

In the district of Ruse there are about 260 buildings which are cultural monuments, and more than 20 of them are enlisted in the international initiative of the European Commission „European Heritage Label“. On the territory of the district are registered round 30 cultural monuments of national importance, concentrated mainly in the municipalities of Ruse and Ivanovo, with smaller areas and points in Dve mogili and Byala (North Central Region, 2012).

The District of Ruse. RUSE (149 000 people) is the fifth by size town in Bulgaria. During the centuries it was called Sexaginta Prista, Pristapolis, Rusi, Ruschuk. It is the site of the Bulgarian Danubian Fleet, large industrial, transport, cultural and scientific center, having a lot of museums and monuments, with a European architectural appearance. In its vicinity is situated the first modern agricultural farm Obratsov chiflik. On the Danube River is the largest river bridge, with two levels for automobile and railway transport. The first railway station on the Ruse-Varna line (1866) is the National Museum of Transport and Communications. In the largest Danubian port are the headquarters of the “Bulgarian River Shipping” and the “Executive Agency for Exploration and Maintenance of the Danube River”. It is the hometown of the Nobel Prize laureate – the writer Elias Canetti.

The District of Silistra. SILISTRA (35 000 people) is successor of the ancient Durostorum, Dorostol, Drastar (Fig. 5). There are a lot of factories in this Danubian port.



Fig. 5. The “Drastar” Fortress

The District of Razgrad. RAZGRAD (33 000 people), is a district center with developed food, china and faience industries, and machinery construction.

The District of Veliko Tarnovo. VELIKO TARNOVO (69 000 people) was the capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, reminder of which are the hills of Tsarevets (Fig. 6), Trapezitsa, Sveta Gora, around which meander the Yantra River. It is remarkable for its unique picturesque amphitheatrical situation. It developed as industrial, transport and university town. The old part of the town attracts many tourists. Veliko Tarnovo is one of the Bulgarian towns which are candidates for European Culture Capital in 2019.



Fig. 6. The Medieval fortress of "Tsarevets".

Gorna Oryahovitsa (31 000 people). It is successor of the old town of Rahovets. It developed as a railway junction, industrial and trade center.

SVISHTOV (30 000 people) developed at the place of the limes castle of Novi. It was an important trade town in IX century. The first trade school in the country was established here. Also an academy of economics was established here. It is the third Bulgarian Danubian port by cargo. The largest industrial enterprise is "Svilosa". East of the town is situated the area called "Pametnitsite" – the place, where the Russian liberators crossed the Danube River.

GABROVO (58 000 people) is situated on the Yantra River. Its upper course – Etar, was used in the past as a driving force (the Etara ethnographic complex) (Fig. 7). Because of its textile industry it earned the nickname "Bulgarian Manchester". There is a Museum of Humour and Satire, Museum of Education in the building of the first secondary school (Doykov..., 2009).

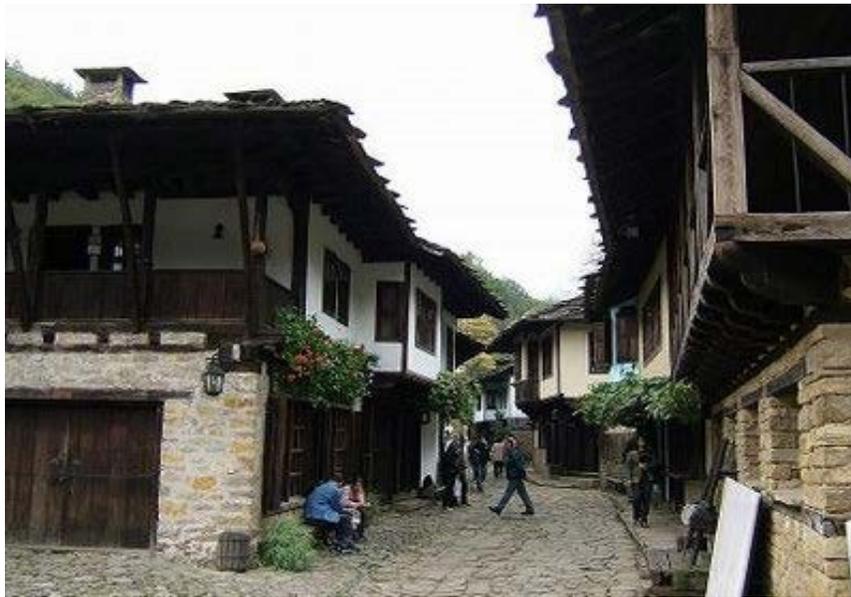


Fig. 7. The Architectural-Ethnographic Complex of "Etar" .

The district has serious demographic and social problems to solve. The economy should be restructured, more foreign investments should be attracted, which would lead to decreasing of the unemployment rate. The infrastructure needs modernization and the existing ecological problems should be overcome.

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